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East Timor: Violations Continue and Doubts Remain Over Official Inquiry

Scores of alleged political activists in East Timor, including many young people and Catholic priests, continue to be subjected to serious human rights violations including imprisonment, death threats and beatings. Amnesty International said the reports of continuing violations highlight the urgent need for an international investigation into the Santa Cruz massacre and its aftermath. The organization was responding to a press statement made today by the government's National Investigation Commission, set up to look into the 12 November massacre.

Amnesty International said that the National Investigation Commission's figure of at least 50 killed in the Santa Cruz massacre was more consistent with the available evidence than military claims that 19 had been killed. Despite the more plausible figure, it said serious doubts remain about the credibility of the investigation. The Commission's claim that the killing resulted from a "spontaneous reaction by soldiers...to protect themselves" is inconsistent with numerous eyewitness reports that the procession was peaceful and that troops were acting in an organized and disciplined manner. Particularly disturbing was the statement that the soldiers had been "provoked" by mourners who had waved "anti-Indonesian" banners.

Amnesty International said: "A proper assessment of the report cannot be undertaken until full details are made public. However, on the basis of the initial findings reported to the media, we continue to have serious doubts about the Commission's investigation. For this reason, and in the light of continuing reports of serious human rights violations in East Timor, we are reiterating our call for a thorough international investigation under United Nations auspices."

Despite severe restrictions on communications with East Timor, recent reports from Dili indicate that military surveillance and intimidation has intensified since the Santa Cruz massacre. The security forces appear to have used the 12 November incident and the national investigation as an opportunity for intimidating and imprisoning suspected opponents of Indonesian rule in East Timor. Government authorities have acknowledged holding 32 political detainees in connection with the incident, at least 8 of whom will be tried for subversion, a crime which carries a maximum penalty of death. Sources in the territory have said that scores of young people have been threatened with death and have expressed fear that some may face extrajudicial execution.

A wide range of people are now believed to be at risk of arrest and other violations. They include participants in the 12 November procession, members of the clergy, people who have spoken with foreign tourists or journalists, and alleged political activists. Some are known to have been beaten and threatened while under interrogation.

One priest, Father Hilario Madeira, aged 39, and his travelling companion were reportedly detained for two days by Indonesian security forces in Bali, during a journey from Java to East Timor in early November. According to reports, soldiers pointed automatic weapons at the two and repeatedly threatened them with death while interrogating them about their alleged political activities. Since his return, Father Hilario has been subjected to further interrogation and intimidation. Another priest, Father Domingos Soares, was stopped and interrogated by military authorities as he returned to his parish from Dili a few days after the 12 November massacre. A third, Father Alberto Ricardo, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Dili, has been repeatedly interrogated by Indonesian security forces for the past three weeks. Colleagues have expressed urgent concern for his mental and physical well-being.

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